

Northern Region Essay Winner

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I look around me to see faces of different colors, eyes holding different stories, and cultures carrying different legacies.

I am fortunate to grow up in a county where cultural, racial, economic, and gender diversities abound. I have learned so much from people around me, celebrated many kinds of festivals, enjoyed a variety of foods and languages, and learned about many unique traditions. However, in an age where we are freer and more empowered than our ancestors ever were before us, it can seem absurd that racism, sexism, and other stigmas that have plagued society for generations before us continue to have a profound impact on society today.

Although past honorees have each impacted lives and communities in distinct and profound ways in fields as different as music and legislation, there is a common link between them. Beth Anne Brown, James Plunky Branch, Anne Bethel Spencer, and all the other honorees have dedicated their time to raising awareness, increasing opportunities, and changing cultural norms to levy the rights of women and minority groups; they worked for change and they worked to make the world a better place for future generations.

Having come from an immigrant family myself, I'm well accustomed to societal stereotypes that cause unfair disadvantages in social, academic or career pursuits. But I have committed myself to the service of my community and the advocacy of my culture and rights that my peers and I deserve.

In my physics class at school I am one of five girls; in my math class, I am one of two. In my free time, I work to raise awareness for girls' opportunities in science and math at a young age at the local elementary school and library. I volunteer at a Fairfax County organization for elderly care, where I spend time with seniors from different backgrounds, raising my own awareness of different cultures while sharing my interests with them.

Proficient in both Indian and western music, I often bring the audience together with a flavor of both the Eastern and Western cultures. As a youth of today and as a leader of tomorrow, I actively engage in creating awareness and understanding of our diversities and advocate a fundamental movement that will result in equality and fairness for all. We are the constituents of freedom. We are men, women and children. We are parents, sisters, and brothers. But first, we are people.